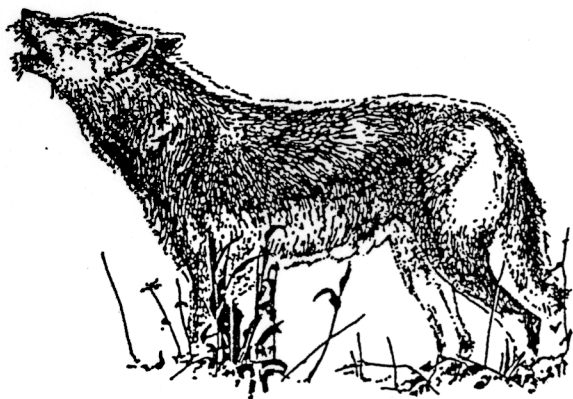


GRAY WOLF

Canis lupus



Official Status: Endangered

Endangered species are species that are in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of their range. It is unlawful to kill, harm, or harass endangered species.

Listed: 43 Federal Register 9612; March 9, 1978 (48 conterminous states except Minnesota).

Historical Status: The gray wolf had the greatest distribution of any mammal other than man. The gray wolf was historically found throughout North America, with the exception of parts of the southwestern and southeastern United States. In the southeastern United States, the gray wolf was replaced by the smaller red wolf. The gray wolf was historically present throughout South Dakota where it was known as the Plains wolf, the buffalo wolf, or the lobo wolf.

Present Status: The gray wolf is extirpated from the lower 48 states, with the exception of Minnesota and small populations in Wisconsin, Michigan, Montana, Idaho, and Washington. However, there have been documented occurrences of gray wolves in South Dakota in 1981, 1986, 1989, 1991, and 1992.

Habitat: Historically, the gray wolf occupied almost all habitats in North America, including the Great Plains. In modern times, the gray wolf has been restricted to habitats with low densities of roads and people. Likely habitat for the gray wolf is remote, forested areas. However, they are occasionally sighted in South Dakota, especially in the northeastern portion of the state and along the major river corridors.

Life History: Gray wolves generally do not breed until they are three years of age. Gray wolves breed in late winter. After a gestation period of 63 days, an average litter of 6 pups is born in a den in the ground, rock pile, hollow log, or other shelter. When the pups reach eight weeks of age, the adults may move them to another den. By October, the pups will weigh about 60 pounds and travel with the adults. Young gray wolves usually stay with the adults for two years, forming a pack. At two years of age, gray wolves may disperse

hundreds of miles from their original home. Gray wolves usually hunt large animals, such as moose and deer, although beaver and other smaller animals supplement their diet. Gray wolves are often more successful taking old, weak, or injured prey. Gray wolves are territorial and will keep other gray wolves and coyotes out of their 50-100 mile² home range. Howling is a way for pack members to communicate.

Aid To Identification: Gray wolves can range in color from white to black, although gray is the predominant color. Mature gray wolves generally weigh from 70-115 pounds and stand about 30 inches high at the shoulder. Coyotes are considerably smaller than gray wolves, usually weighing less than 35 pounds. A good field guide is that gray wolves will be larger than a typical German shepherd while coyotes will be smaller. The track of a gray wolf will be about 5 inches long compared to 3 inches for a coyote track. Some dogs, such as Great Danes, can have tracks as large as a gray wolf.

Reasons For Decline: Gray wolves have been exterminated by man throughout most of their original range. Shooting, trapping, and poisoning were often subsidized by the government. Illegal shooting continues to be a problem.

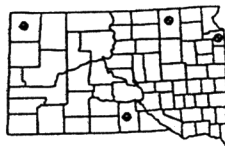
Recommendations: Reports or signs of gray wolves should be reported to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, (605) 224-8693, or the South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks, (605) 773-4345.

Comments: There are no known gray wolf attacks on humans in modern times in North America. Gray wolves do take livestock, although the occurrences are rare. In gray wolf range in Minnesota, gray wolves take only 1 of every 2,000 cattle. Most gray wolves avoid livestock. Some states have programs that reimburse livestock owners for wolf damage.

References: *Wolf! A Modern Look by Wolves in American Culture Committee, 1986.*

Gray Wolf

- Present Range (Includes Alaska)
- Reported Occurrences Post-1980



South Dakota



North America

Present range of the gray wolf.

• 1993 U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service; Pierre, South Dakota